

RURAL & FARMING EXECUTIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2024 - 2.30 PM



PRESENT: Councillor T Taylor (Chairman), Councillor J Clark, Councillor S Count, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor Mrs D Laws and Councillor C Marks

APOLOGIES: Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman)

Officers in attendance: Anna Goodall (Assistant Director), Simon Jackson (Economic Growth Manager) and Helen Moore (Member Services and Governance Officer)

RF9/24 **APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR**

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Laws, seconded by Councillor Marks and resolved that Councillor Taylor be elected Chairman of the Rural and Farming Executive Advisory Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2024/25.

RF10/24 **APPOINTMENT OF THE VICE CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR**

It was proposed by Councillor Taylor, seconded by Councillor Mrs Laws and resolved that Councillor Mrs French be elected Vice-Chairman of the Rural and Farming Executive Advisory Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2024/25.

RF11/24 **PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of 13 March 2024 were confirmed and signed.

RF12/24 **TO RECEIVE MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS UNDER THE LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ANY ITEM TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING**

Councillor Mrs Laws declared that she is the Portfolio Holder for Planning and also for flooding and would not take part in any planning application discussions or voting thereon.

Councillor Marks declared that he was Vice Chairman of the Planning Committee and would take no part in any planning discussions or voting thereon.

RF13/24 **RECENT MOTIONS TO FULL COUNCIL IN RELATION TO FARMING AND RURAL MATTERS - NEXT STEPS**

Councillor Taylor referred to the recent motion that had been submitted and approved at Full Council in relation to farming and rural matters.

No questions were received from the committee.

RF14/24 **MAGPAS REGARDING WORK IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE FARMING COMMUNITY**

An update was given by Emma Sanders from Magpas on the work it is undertaking in relation to the rural communities.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Taylor asked if the drugs Magpas use are more expensive than the ones used by the Air Ambulance service? Emma Sanders responded Magpas purchases everything to be able to deliver their service, there is no support from the NHS, Government funding or National Lottery funding, grants are applied for through foundations and trusts and some purchases are made through the NHS with a discount but the majority of life saving drugs are purchased by Magpas itself.
- Councillor Mrs Laws asked if the doctors and nurses give their time freely and what does the fundraising money contribute towards? Emma Sanders responded staff are all paid and running cost are covered out of the charity money but 70% of the charity money does go back into the service. She stated that because of the nature of the job, staff do need to be paid and to cover all the costs, the charity needs to raise £6,000,000 per year to keep the consistency of the service that is provided, there are around 60 volunteers who come and assist with the administration of running events for the fundraising and accounts side of the charity who give up hundreds of hours to help Magpas raise much needed money.
- Councillor Mrs Laws stated that the National Lottery was mentioned, do Magpas not apply for that funding? Emma Sanders replied Magpas has never received National Lottery Funding as the applications have never been successful, but there has been success with other applications like the Lyle Foundation during the Covid pandemic, this same foundation also gave Magpas a grant to purchase land to operate from.
- Councillor Mrs Laws stated there are professionals that can complete application forms for grants and funding, is this something that has been considered? Emma Sanders responded that within Magpas there is a colleague who works on all the applications for trusts, grants and foundations to enable the charity to receive money for any equipment the charity may need.
- Councillor Count asked how did Magpas end up with their vehicles and how do they receive 999 calls? Emma Sanders responded that when a 999 call is made at that desk is a critical care paramedic who is employed by the Air Ambulance and that paramedic listens in on every call and depending on the emergency the nearest Air Ambulance will be dispatched which will then trigger a call to Magpas if they are the nearest. She stated that if the weather is unsuitable for flying then the vehicles will take over, the rapid response cars operate as a delivery system rather than a full working ambulance with the key equipment needed to perform any operation required at the scene of an emergency and once the patient is stable, they will then be transferred to an ambulance.
- Councillor Humphrey asked why both the Air Ambulance and Magpas operate in the same area? Emma Sanders responded Magpas have been operating in the same area for 50 years and the Air Ambulance moved from Norfolk to Cambridgeshire 20 years ago. She stated that the two charities do operate separately but when there is an emergency need, they all work alongside each other.
- Councillor Marks asked whether Magpas claims anything back from insurance companies for equipment that has been used, for example the £135 cost for using breathing equipment at a road traffic accident? Emma Sanders stated this is something that is presently being investigated.
- Councillor Marks stated that he was not aware of the location of the new base mentioned in the presentation. Emma Sanders replied Magpas is now based at Alconbury Wields in a purpose-built facility which was funded through various funds, trusts and foundations, which has allowed them to improve on the service with the addition of sleeping pods for the shift workers, there is a family room so patients can come and talk through their experiences and understand what happened to them and seek further support if needed, there is a donated gym facility to help keep the medical team physically and mentally fit plus there is a simulator room to help with training needs which emerge from the medical team being in a medical emergency environment and allows them to practice working in an emergency

situation.

Members noted the information provided.

RF15/24 NORTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH CARE PARTNERSHIP

An update was provided on healthy eating and healthy weight by John Rooke, Managing Director, of North Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Care Partnership.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Taylor stated that he has been working with MP Steven Barclay on the Feed Fenland project and he visited a care home and found a freezer full of convenience food for the residents which had been imported and asked why processed food is so cheap stating this needs to be investigated if things are to change.
- Councillor Mrs Laws stated that education is needed around seasonal foods and cooking from scratch. She expressed the view that this could be started at a school age with the use of community allotments to see how food is grown and then learning to use items in the kitchen like a slow cooker for convenience and low-cost meals rather than convenience meals.
- Councillor Marks stated his observation has been that a lot of life choices comes down to convenience as the average household does not have the time to cook a family meal due to parents working and children are not introduced to vegetables very much anymore at home or at school because it is easier to feed children what they want which does not always mean healthy. John Rooke responded though councils and partnerships there is a degree of control about what sort of food is served in schools and care homes, there has been work happening to get people excited about food which does include local cookery lessons which have proved successful and as a result of this there are plans to expand this further and to start looking at what sort of equipment people need to enable this whether it be a slow cooker or it is basic equipment like pots, pans etc. He added that there is a plan to explore how potentially local produce can be used locally in food banks instead of ultra processed foods and also within the care homes.
- Councillor Marks stated that education is needed within the food industry for children as so many children do not know that milk comes from cows and potatoes come out of the ground. He added that food waste is something else that needs to be addressed, for example it is coming up to Halloween and the average farm will move between 16-17 million pumpkins but around 100,000 of those pumpkins will end up in the bin or recycling and not even be used for food purposes. Councillor Marks stated that if children could be educated that when carving a pumpkin for Halloween the carvings could be made into pumpkin soup for example that would make a big difference to their education.
- Councillor Mrs Laws stated education needs to start at home and feels school trips to local farms should be on the curriculum to strengthen children's education and domestic science.
- Councillor Taylor stated that he has tried to invite schools to his farm but due to Health and Safety laws this does not make it viable.
- Councillor Count stated in the presentation there is a large section on ultra processed foods and the harm they can cause with the focus being mainly on snacks. He continued to ask how the takeaway scene feeds into this because from another perspective there is talk around takeaways being bad for you due to calories and portion sizes, in the case of the ultra processed foods from the document is this the most damaging end of the sphere. John Rooke responded that the ultra processed foods are the most damaging for consumers due to the different chemicals, preservatives, monosodium glutamate and high levels of salt added plus the level of some meats are not of the best cuts and can be substituted compared to some takeaways that do cook fresh ingredients like Indian, fish and chips or Chinese.
- Councillor Taylor stated that he did some research two years ago into takeaways in March

town and found this evidence to be true in regard of different preservatives being used in takeaway food.

- Councillor Mrs Laws referred to a project the chef Jamie Oliver started around not encouraging snack bars and shops within local school areas and stated this is something the local Council can investigate when looking through the local planning review and use this knowledge for future plans that are submitted.
- John Rooke stated that Peterborough Council are putting restrictions on advertising unhealthy foods around its city and on buses and this is something that would be good to replicate with the County Council and District Councils.
- Councillor Marks agreed with the restriction on advertising and stated in some cases the younger generation are changing the way they eat but it can also be in some cases the older generation that are not willing to change because their palettes are not used to the artificial flavourings or sweeteners that are an alternative offer. John Rooke stated there is some national legislation guidelines to help with how advertising can be changed and what could be achieved locally. He continued there are times every adult needs to take responsibility and understand that the foods that are less healthy are fine in moderation and it is not for the authorities to police how people live their lives but providing enough information for them to improve the number of healthy alternatives for people to consider.
- Councillor Mrs Laws asked if North Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Care Partnership is working with local food banks? John Rooke replied there is a good connection with all the local food banks in the area but one area that is being considered is instead of supplying families with a can of processed soup, could a bag of vegetables be given instead and there has also been suggestions of food banks having their own allotments to help support local people having access to local produce.
- Councillor Taylor stated the majority of local farms that grow vegetables have stock feed available that is possibly not acceptable for the supermarket shelf and asked if this could be put to better use? John Rooke stated this is an area that is being investigated.
- Councillor Mrs Laws offered a suggestion of adding a recipe card with any bags of vegetables given out to encourage cooking on a budget.

Members noted the information provided.

(Councillor Taylor declared that he has involvement with North Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Care Partnership but has no conflict of interest)

RF16/24 EASTERN POWERHOUSE

An update was given by James Palmer from Eastern Powerhouse on introducing investment into the Fens.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Taylor stated he had been working on some figures concerning the reservoir due to be built in the area and for 100 farms to have a 20 acre reservoir it will give the same amount of water capacity as the Chatteris reservoir and he feels this project will be successful. James Palmer responded Anglian Water as well as Eastern Powerhouse are very keen to see the reservoir take place and feels it will be supported well with the new Government in place. He added that there is a meeting to be held between Anglian Water and senior civil servants to discuss the time scale of the Chatteris reservoir with the likelihood of the development happening before 2040.
- Councillor Marks stated there has been conflicting information regarding the reservoir and concerns that the water source is not just for Cambridgeshire but going to go further into the home counties as part of their quantity of water. He questioned if the plans are going to change could this take up more land which will take more land away from food production, with there already being the add ons like the maze which is taking over a lot of the land and also the glass and solar farms. Councillor Marks expressed concern that soon there will not be a rural community because there will be no land to grow on because there will not be

enough land left for food produce and all the land will be consumed for energy use. James Palmer responded that the rural community of the Fens has become an agricultural business over the last 40 years, this idea of a group of reservoirs across the Fens is not to replace the Fenland reservoir but to allow the area to be proactive in the current situation and to take away that timeline issue of protecting water. He stated that the mention of a maze and glass houses is happening because farmers cannot make money out of agricultural land, with farmers being businessmen and need to make money but what the Fens have above other agricultural sites is the network of drainage to allow the farmers to make the most out of the land that they have. Councillor Marks stated that many of the farmers in the local area who live next to a river bank have been told that they could not have an extraction licence because the Internal Drainage Board or Middle Level has led them to believe there is not enough water coming down the river, and now there is a suggestion that there is going to be 2,000 acres of water and farmers will be asking if they could not use it then, why now? He added that now the reservoir is going to be built why can it not be used on local land before it gets moved onto other home counties? Councillor Marks continued he does support the idea of smaller reservoirs, however, he can see that there is a conflict of interest and people's livelihoods and properties are being put at risk. James Palmer responded that this is an ongoing project and the Government have asked Anglian Water experts whether there is the possibility of delivering a reservoir, the feasibility work is now being carried out, in the meeting he has attended with the Civil Service there does not seem to be an understanding of the timeline necessary to deliver a major reservoir in the Fens. He continued as a local authority there is not a lot that can be done when it comes to a National Infrastructure with local councils being subservient to larger authorities but in this case Fenland District Council are not subservient to larger authorities and if the Council want to pass a reservoir on a piece of land next to a drain that is a decision for the Planning Committee at Fenland District Council.

- Councillor Taylor asked if a farmer has land that is set aside due to poor soil quality could this not be an ideal area for a reservoir?
- Councillor Marks stated that Home Fen is one of the most fertile parts of this whole area, yet somebody has seen fit to flood it and put a few cows on it whereas that land was producing three crops every two years of good return, and, in his opinion, this land should be kept instead of putting reservoirs, glass farms, solar farms and more on it. He stated this is a rural committee and that is what he thought that the remit should be rather than trying to judge whether the Council should be putting in a huge water course, a lot of farmers over the years have wanted to irrigate and create reservoirs and have faced rejection from Middle Level as there has not been enough water supply and now it seems the rules have changed.
- Councillor Count stated he agreed with the part of the presentation that mentioned that the East of England has been ignored for far too long and that is probably because there is not a substantial business voice that the Government is forced to listen to. He expressed the opinion, on the reservoir itself, he has read through the notes, and it sounds interesting, he does agree with Councillor Marks that there will be a reservoir built and the Council will not have much input but does feel farmers are struggling with lack of water and smaller reservoirs would solve this problem, but it needs to be sooner rather than later. Councillor Count continued that it would be beneficial for Fenland District Council to reunite with Eastern Powerhouse to give the Council a bigger voice. He asked, in the evidence that Eastern Powerhouse are putting forward and that the Government funding will come based on evidence, what are the big projects for East Anglia that have got the biggest BCRs? James Palmer responded the strongest BCRs and the most important projects in the entire region are, the Ely North junction as that affects people in Peterborough, Ipswich, Norwich, Cambridge and Fenland, the A47 which has been lobbied for years and needs to be a motorway, and the same case stands for the A12. He added that the other area is the rail network, there is a good network, but it is slow, and the existing infrastructure needs to be upgraded to give the rail service better access to all areas, but it comes down to whether Central Government want to put the funding into the East of England area. Councillor Count

highlighted that the construction of the Cambridge South connection is going ahead and there is still no timetable as to what will be built, his understanding was that access will allow residents to travel from Whittlesey to March to Manea into Cambridge then onto Addenbrookes and he is hoping that when it is finished all trains will stop at all stations which is not happening at present. James Palmer responded those decisions are in the hands of Network Rail and he would like to work hand in hand with Fenland District Council again to try and lobby some of the subjects covered today around the reservoir and was happy to put a proposal document together to include Anglian Water.

- Councillor Mrs Laws asked has there been a reason the Council has disconnected with Eastern Powerhouse? James Palmer expressed the view that it had just lapsed and that there was no other reason. Councillor Mrs Laws expressed the view that working with Eastern Powerhouse again would give the Council strength and a sense of teamwork and she would like to propose at this committee that it is brought forward to Cabinet. She agreed with the reservoirs but also would like to see Ely Junction completed as this would give Fenland the opportunity to open up economic growth, which is holding this area back at the moment.
- Councillor Marks thanked James for his work as Mayor and working on the Manea Car Park and stated sadly the trains hardly stop and he felt sure if more trains stopped at Manea it would open up this rural area for travel and help surrounding villages like Welney, and it was refreshing to hear someone is fighting for the Fenland area as evidence shows businesses are moving out of the area through lack of infrastructure and things need to change to make Fenland an attractive place for businesses.
- Councillor Laws stated she would like to propose that members bring this forward to Cabinet to explore rejoining Eastern Powerhouse for two reasons, which are to explore the reservoir issue which has been discussed and also the Ely Junction. Councillor Marks stated he would like to add to help economic growth with businesses and second the proposal. Anna Goodall confirmed she would write a report to present to the Cabinet members.
- Councillor Clark asked if Anglian Water could be invited to the next meeting to get their feel for where the system fits in with the reservoir to be able to gain a better understanding of the plans before he could make an informed decision.
- Councillor Taylor agreed it would be a good idea to invite Anglian Water to the meeting as there are too many conflicting stories around the completion date and the farming community are being told what they can and cannot do before any agreement has been made.
- Councillor Marks agreed with Councillor Clark as it sounds like Anglian Water and Eastern Powerhouse are working in conjunction with each other. James Palmer stated he would like to reiterate that Eastern Powerhouse are working with the leaders of the two councils, and it is not proposing this is undertaken instead of the main reservoir, Eastern Powerhouses concern is that the reservoir is going to take time, at least until 2036 if not longer, and by getting involved the local councils can be proactive in the short term. He stated that smaller reservoirs would not bring the same solution as a single reservoir would offer but it would offer water security and the ability to grow the economy in the short term, Anglian Water are members of Eastern Powerhouse and if the offer of the two councils are to be taken up there would be a chance to work together with the Environment Agency to ensure the Fenland area has water security and there is a stronger input on how the reservoir will look.
- Councillor Marks asked if the chair of Eastern Powerhouse and Anglian Water could be invited to the next meeting so as a committee, members could hear what both parties have to say.
- Councillor Clark agreed with Councillor Marks and would like a better understanding of where the money is coming from to deliver this project as there is an understanding that Anglian Water will be adding a percentage to the water bills to pay for the reservoir. James Palmer added that he would like to put a document together that is well researched which could be presented to Government to make a difference to water scarcity in the UK within the lifespan of this Parliament, this will act as a bid to Government for funding as this is not

something that the local councils will be funding.

- Councillor Mrs Laws stated she was encouraged to hear how to lobby government and she felt the more team members are involved brings strength and the added gift of being in control of local planning.
- Councillor Marks suggested it would be a good idea to include Middle Level in these discussions as Middle Level may still say no extraction of water even with smaller reservoirs being planned.
- Councillor Mrs Laws made the point that there are plenty of local councillors that sit on the IDB and Subsidiary Boards to be able to ask these questions raised today and demand answers.

Members noted the information presented and agreed that a report be taken to Cabinet about rejoining Eastern Powerhouse and the James Palmer, Anglian Water and the Internal Drainage Boards be invited to a future meeting.

RF17/24 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Marks suggested inviting the Economic Growth Team with a presentation to get a feel for what they think the one big reservoir will bring regarding growth to the area in comparison to 100 little reservoirs in the area.

Councillor Mrs Laws expressed the view that the March 2025 meeting was too far away and could it be moved forward?

4.55 pm

Chairman